

Illegal immigration a complex issue

By Rep. Ernest Istook

As the grandson of immigrants, I appreciate the emotion in Isabel Chancellor's comments (Opinion, Dec. 7), but I disagree with her conclusions.

Entering our country illegally is a crime, and should remain a crime. The problem has become complex because we have not devoted enough resources and enough will to solve it.

I'm one of many lawmakers who support a stronger commitment to protect our borders. My father's parents were born in Hungary; they came to America legally through Ellis Island. I welcome and embrace those who come here and who do so legally. We also expect their sponsors to fulfill the obligation they assume, guaranteeing that those they sponsor do not become a burden on taxpayers.

Unfortunately, today's tide of illegals strains our public resources and clogs the system for those who want to come here properly. That's why legal immigrants often face long waits for approval.

We all should welcome law-abiding newcomers. They are a great positive for America. But they must accept obligations also. They should learn English — a legal requirement to become an American citizen. We should take the next step and declare English as our official language.

Everyone sympathizes with those who lack opportunity in their home country and who hope to find it here. But the long-term solution is not to have the whole world arrive at our doorstep.

If other nations would adopt America's principles — including freeenterprise, constitutionally protected freedoms, and government by the people — they could create prosperity in their own lands. Those countries need hardworking citizens who will change their societies, and we should help them with policies that encourage reforms in their countries.

Istook, R-Warr Acres, represents Oklahoma's 5th District, and has announced he plans to run for governor in 2006.